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Underground Soviet Paper Appears Again

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MOSCOW — The anonymous underground staff has resumed publication of a small civil rights newspaper 18 months after the Soviet secret police (KGB) forced it out of business.

Called the Chronicle of Current Events, the flimsy typewritten paper circulated for more than four years until October, 1972, when a massive KGB investigation titled Case 24 brought the arrest, trial and conviction of many activists accused of helping the operation.

Dissident sources said at the time that the true editors of the Chronicle had escaped the KGB's net but had decided to suspend operations. Their decision came after the police had threatened to arrest many more persons and to hold them hostage for each new copy of the paper that appeared.

In recent days, three new editions of the Chronicle, Nos. 28, 29 and 30, were circulated, resuming the story of official repression of all sorts of anti-establishment individuals where Issue 27 left off 18 months before.

The editors in Issue 28 blamed the interruption in their work on "repeated and unambiguous threats by the KGB to answer each new issue of the Chronicle with new arrests, the arrests of people suspected by the KGB of publication or distribution of new or past issues."

"The nature of the moral situation in which people found themselves presented with the difficult necessity of taking decisions not just for themselves does not need explanation."

The editors said that to remain silent longer "would have indicated support, albeit indirect and passive, of 'hostage tactics' which are incompatible with the rights, ethics and dignity of man."

The Case 24 investigation, which was ordered in December, 1971, apparently by the Politburo of the Communist Party, the highest political authority in the country, inspired police searches, arrests and trials in many cities. Most of the cases were reported in the Chronicle.

Last August, Case 24 reached a climax with the closed trial of two widely known political dissidents, Viktor Krasin and Pyotr Yakir, who confessed to helping to produce and distribute some issues of the Chronicle.

Both men were given light sentences served largely before their trial. A widely publicized, government-sponsored press conference followed. The two men are now serving exile terms in separate cities 150 miles from Moscow.

The Yakir-Krasin trial, the trials of other activists and the exiling from the country of others suggested that the small but persistent movement for free speech and debate had been snuffed out.

Only a small group that rallied around the internationally known physicist, Andrei Sakharov, seemed to survive.

The three new Chronicles suggest that the editors continued to gather material during the period when they were not publishing. No. 28 covers the last three months of 1972 and No. 29 and No. 30 cover all of 1973.

As before, the Chronicle tells of police actions against religious, nationalist and political activities in many sections of the country. It also tells of prisoners in camps and mental hospitals. Most of the news had previously reached western correspondents.

Previously, the editors had maintained a bimonthly publication schedule but it is not known if they will try to resume that program. Only a few dozen copies of the new editions have been circulated but readers are expected to make new carbon copies and distribute them to dissident sources said.